

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

Deadline for e-zine submissions: February 25th!

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My Writing: Katie Ellis



I am a writer; I'm actually finishing up my second book. As a writer though I'm an avid procrastinator too and one of my favourite methods to procrastinate is to read. When I was about 15 I would only clean my room when I finished the book I was reading. My motivations were not that I was so enthralled in the book that I could not be disturbed, it was because I knew that by cleaning my room I would probably find enough loose change to walk to the shops and buy another book and if I was lucky an apple turn over with cream. Now that I am over thirty I'm sure that my parents used to plant money in my room to encourage my cleaning, but they never did admit it.

I was an avid reader because I wanted to be a writer. In the darkest moment of my life, when at the age of 18 I had a massive stroke and almost died, I knew that I would be okay as this was a great story—this was something I could write about!

I'm trying desperately to be the girl I used to be but there was nothing wrong with her. She wasn't trapped in a body that doesn't work. Sometimes I think I did die and this is actually hell. I'm so scared I might not get better but how can I tell myself this, let alone other people? Is this really a life wasted? No one really understands what I'm going through, but how does feeling sorry for myself help? Now I'm living in a rehab hospital, depending on people I don't know to wash, dress, and toilet me. Sometimes it gets me down that everyone in this hospital is so much older than me. I'm only somewhat comforted when told that younger people have a higher chance of recovery, because I'm also constantly reminded how abnormal it is for an 18-year-old to have a stroke in the first place.

April 1997

Its chaotic writing true, but that was the way I needed to write at the time. I knew a story was there. This could even be a book I thought; this isn't the sort of thing that happens to most 18 year olds. I'm still yet to write that book but I will because that experience led me on a path to postgraduate study and an investigation of the ways society constrains and disables people with disability or who are experiencing serious illness.

When I began this research, my interest in disability was largely due to my own experience with disability. Following a stroke, I have for the last seven years lived with weakness and spasticity in the left side of my body and epilepsy. I

began this research hoping to answer two questions ¾ how is disability represented, and why was I so keen to pass as able bodied in my own life? Was I somehow less Australian, less female because of my impairments? The more I read about the social model of disability, the more I began to question my own identity and the way others would have me behave. This new model resonated in my life and allowed me access to an identity of which I had previously been ashamed. I became absorbed in the debate as it ran through every aspect of my life, often seeping into practical aspects of my research.

Introduction to [My PhD thesis You Look Normal to Me](#) 2004

In 2008, I converted my PhD into an academic monograph and published my first book [Disabling Diversity](#). The thing with writing a book is that it's so incredibly draining but at the same time so rewarding that you'll want to do another one. And so now I am onto my second book, another academic text that looks at how people with disability are using the internet and the ways inaccessibility is blocking their participation. In many ways I can't believe I'm a published author and I still feel unpublished because I haven't embarked on my stroke story yet in a really meaningful way.

Writing about what we know and experience, both good and bad is vital to the diversity of the human race. Not only can we learn from each other but writing too gives us a way to work through what we are experiencing, a strategy to get on with our lives. Writing has helped me in times of great crisis and helped shaped who I am now.

This year I am making a new commitment to writing, in the form of blogging. I'll be writing fairly regular columns for Shakespeare's sister on disability, popular culture and my journey as a female writer in a disabling world. As well as this I'll be blogging on my own site www.katieellis.com and writing film reviews there too. This year I'll get my pages of notes, old diaries, letters and cards together into a memoir that I can't wait to see sitting on my bookshelf.

Several books have changed my life but I think I'm most into those quasi journalistic/ academic ones. Naomi Wolf's *Promiscuities* definitely changed my life, I read it the week I turned 21 and basically have not bought another Cleo or Cosmo magazine since then except for the times I bring them into class for my students to deconstruct in relation to body image and social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Janine Shepherd's *Never Tell Me Never* was a source of great comfort to me during my hospitalisation and rehabilitation yet I never ever plan on becoming a pilot like her. Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* and Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a way of healing* have both given me fantastic insight about how writing about illness can help you come to terms with the world of health and your place in it. I enjoyed the accessibility of Ariel Levy's *Female Chauvinist Pigs* although wasn't fully convinced by the arguments and felt she left out some fantastic opportunities for self reflection. Some of my favourite authors whose works are so many that's its easier to list their names than the titles include Rosemary Garland Thompson, Gerard Goggin and [Tara Brabazon](#).

I'm currently reading *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*

-Katie Ellis

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